

Southern Appalachian Creature Feature Podcasts

White Nose Syndrome

Good morning and welcome to the Southern Appalachian Creature Feature. This week, we'll look at a mysterious condition killing thousands of bats in the Northeast that biologists hope to keep from spreading to the Southern Appalachians.

Last winter, biologists found several thousand dead bats in caves around Albany, New York. A majority of the dead bats had a white fungal growth on their noses, giving the condition the name white nose syndrome. The bats were found closer to cave entrances than normal, and had apparently used up their winter fat stores.

White nose syndrome doesn't just strike a single species of bat. So far, little brown and Northern myotis bats have succumbed, as well as hundreds of federally endangered Indiana bats.

White nose syndrome has quickly become the biggest concern in the U.S. bat conservation community, and a concern that has generated more questions than answers. How is the disease spread? Is the white fungus the cause of death, or merely a symptom of another problem? If a symptom of another problem, what is that problem?

Conservationists have mobilized a variety of resources to address the problem. Virologists, bacteriologists, and mycologists are studying dead bats searching for viral, bacterial or fungal causes or contributors to death. Biologists are surveying northeastern caves for signs of white nose syndrome – not only the white muzzles, but odd behavior like grouping near the entrance of caves or leaving the cave when they should be hibernating. States in the affected areas ask people to avoid caves in an effort to cut off a possible transmission, and the Fish & Wildlife Service asks all cave visitors to follow certain recommendations:

- Don't touch any bats, living or dead, especially those with a white nose.
- If you're in a cave and see bats with white noses, leave immediately and decontaminate your clothing and gear before visiting another cave.
- Contact your state fish and wildlife agency or your nearest U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Field Office to report your potential white nose syndrome observations.
- Report any dead bats found outdoors or any unusual numbers of bats outside during cold weather, especially near a cave or mine where bats hibernate.
- After caving, remove your gear at your vehicle and seal it in a plastic bag to avoid contaminating your car or truck.
- Decontaminate your caving clothes by washing with hot water, detergent, and bleach and drying thoroughly at a high temperature.

- Scrape dirt from boots and soak them in a solution of 1 part chlorine bleach, 9 parts water.
- Wash or soak cave packs and clean helmets and lights with a similar bleach solution.

We hope white nose syndrome is a passing phenomena that with the help of all cave visitors, will remain isolated to the Northeast.

For WNCW and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, this is Gary Peeples.